Summary
Poets and Earnings: The Social Embedding of the Authorship of Jan Vos (1610-1667)

It is generally believed that hack writing in the Dutch Republic only arose in the eighteenth century, coming to play a more significant part in the nineteenth century. Yet authors received payment for their work long before that, as we know from numerous examples from the late Middle Ages. So, what was the situation for the Dutch Golden Age? Poets at the time were very pronounced about writing for honour alone and indeed there are few examples of financial rewards for literary works. Because poets as a rule did not share in the profits yielded by their printed works, there was no commercial authorship to speak of. Structurally subsidised authors were few to none, moreover, because the Republic – unlike surrounding countries – lacked a flourishing court culture or dominant church who could have served as patrons for the arts. Yet patronage takes up a key position in answering the question of Dutch seventeenth-century poets’ earnings.

The Dutch Republic featured a culture of reciprocity and it is likely that literary men participated in it too. Studies on literary patronage in bourgeois culture of the seventeenth-century Republic are few in number, however, and are mainly centred on the figure of the patron and the benefits of patronage from his point of view. So far, benefits on the part of poets and the role of the literary work in the relation of patronage have hardly been addressed. The present study means to change this. Taking as a starting point the dominance of reciprocal patronage in the bourgeois culture of the Republic, it examines how social circumstances determined the production of poetry by seventeenth-century poets and, conversely, how this poetical production determined the poets’ social circumstances.

A central case study in this is formed by the authorship of Jan Vos (1610-1667). Born and bred in Amsterdam, the poet was a glazier by profession and belonged to the well-to-do middle class. In his spare time he wrote two tragedies, a farce, and more than 1400 poems. Vos’s literary production was appreciated by a broad audience, but as far as we can tell he did not share in the profits from his published works. Just like his fellow poets he would repeatedly stress to be writing for honour alone. But his authorship was strongly embedded in society and a large number of his poems were addressed to men wealthier and more powerful than Vos himself: the Amsterdam regents. This raises the question of the kind of gains Vos could draw from his authorship, socially as well as financially, and what part was played by his poems in this.

In answering these questions, the present study joins two different literary historical debates. In the first place this study aims to contribute to research into poets and their earnings in the seventeenth-century Republic along the lines sketched above. Secondly, it will shed new
light on the life and work of Vos. The reception of his work has been quite heterogeneous after his death, and even now a debate continues on a number of aspects in his work. The present study offers new answers to questions that keep recurring, such as the dominant role of the visual in his work, the limited role of religion, the relation between Vos and Joost van den Vondel, the remarkably long gap between the two tragedies Vos wrote and the emphatic opposition between glaziership and authorship in Vos’s own work as well as in contemporary sources.

The present study’s introductory chapter shows how Vos, due to the enthusiastic reception of his first tragedy *Aran en Titus* (1641), came to form part of a network of literary men, earning him the position of ‘poet’ which brought him into touch with the Amsterdam regent elite. This connection crucially effectuated the social embedding of Vos’s authorship; his poems partook of and shaped a relation of patronage with the Amsterdam city regents.

Vos’s poems and *tableaux vivants* contributed to the regents’ social standing and to the image they wished to give off. He could support their policy in his poems. In return, he would occasionally receive financial compensation, but this was not very usual. There were no patrons in the true sense of the word offering (material) support on a structural basis because of Vos’s surplus cultural value; but (social) capital was exchanged in a reciprocal relation by means of and in the poems. It was possible for Vos to benefit not just as a poet, but in different social roles, from his good relations with the regents and to offer something in exchange as well. Chapters two to six are centred on the roles on which the patronage relation between Vos and the regents was founded; those of city poet, house poet, man of the theatre, glazier, and tolerant Roman Catholic.

In his role as city poet, Vos praised in countless poems and tableaux vivants the city council’s policy. In exchange he would occasionally be asked to write a poem, and more often than that to design a tableau vivant, both for pay. Outside the city council he would also write poems in praise of city regents, and with a few of them he functioned as a house poet of sorts. This was especially the case with the Huydecoper family, and somewhat less so with the Hinlopen family and the Witsens. In their homes Vos combined praise with education and entertainment. To be invited at regents’ homes might yield some financial gain, but such occasions were especially useful for extending his network. These homes were visited by relatives, friends, and fellow regents who in one way or another could be important to Vos. His connections with regents formed the building blocks for his reputation. Being a house poet meant that he was regularly invited or that he received presents; and of course it also boosted his role as city poet.

In 1647 Vos was appointed one of the six theatre leaders, due, most likely, not just to his success in the theatre alone but also to his being well connected to the city regents. The burgomasters had a say in the matter of the theatre leaders’ annual reappointments. It was an honorary position which could bring certain benefits to Vos as a playwright, while at the same time he could look after the representative and social interests at stake for the burgomasters in this city institution. Perhaps he managed to acquire some glazier commissions in the theatre. Being a glazier meant that Vos could equally be employed in the renovation or construction of many other buildings in town. He became the “city glazier” from 1652, a position he probably acquired thanks to his patronage connections with the regents. The same was true for the
abundant liberties he had in calvinist Amsterdam. Most city regents propagated a policy of
tolerance with respect to those with a different faith, and this suited Vos, who was a Roman
Catholic, very well. In this respect he also met the regents halfway, by behaving as a tolerant
catholic and generally refraining from religious disputes. Vos adhered to the freedom of reli-
gion and favoured a pragmatic view on how people with different ideas on faith should live
together, without pushing things to far or posturing to emphatically as a Roman Catholic.

Although Vos's poems were only one element in the exchange of capital, they did play a cru-
icial part in the relation of patronage, which involved a third party apart from Vos and the re-
gents: the public at large. The poems by Vos served to cast a public profile of the regents both in
relation to citizens and to each other. They also acted as a means of communication and arena
of negotiation between Vos and the regents, served to create some entertainment within the
homes of regents, and could moreover buttress Vos's public profile. The relation of patronage
took shape in and through the poems.

Insight into the social embedding of Vos's authorship offers a new perspective in the re-
search on how Vos and Vondel related to one another as poets (in literary history this relation is
often felt to be problematic), which is therefore addressed in chapter seven. Vos and Vondel of-
ten covered the same subjects – for at least 150 of Vos's poems an equivalent in the work of Von-
del can be found – and it is striking that these were often topics concerned with Amsterdam,
such as the opening of the new town hall in 1655 or the fire of the New Church in 1645, and of
course the Amsterdam regents themselves. A comparative study of these poems shows that the
poets each took a different course in approaching the Amsterdam patrons, which meant they
were not hindering each other, although this strategy could have been inspired by competi-
tiveness. For example, the different town hall poems by the two poets both served to account
for and extol the major project of building the town hall, but this objective was carried out in
different modes: Vondel wrote an argumentative, political-philosophical poem, whereas Vos
produced an allegorical spectacle.

The concluding chapter also addresses some other questions on Vos's authorship. Social
embedding turns out to have been an important constituent of his poetics. The visual na-
ture of his work is connected to the city regents' preference for the visual, and the countless
ekphrastic poems will have had a function of entertainment in the homes of the same regents.
Vos's paying attention to glaziership in his work has to do with acquiring commissions as a
glazier and betrays a kind of self-promotion, while his limited attention to matters of faith
should be seen in light of supporting the stance of tolerance his patrons adhered to. The re-
markably large gap between the two tragedies by Vos remains an intricate question, but most
certainly it had to do with Vos's function as theatre leader and the appreciation this entailed
in the circles of regents. It was only when his position became less stable in the 1660s, that he
started upon his second tragedy, Medea.

This study into the social embedding of Jan Vos's authorship generates moreover a new
perspective on poets and earnings. Between honour and financial gains seventeenth-century
poets could shore up quite a lot, and patronage could be a leading principle in this – also in the
bourgeois culture of the Dutch Republic. Poems took up a central position in such a relation
of patronage as well as in the triangular relation between patron, poet, and audience. The lit-
erary and social systems of power that played a role in this entailed limitations, but possibili-
ties too. This appears for example from the way in which the use of literary conventions could be deployed or perceived as partly constituting the practice and profile of authorship. In short, the practice of early modern poetical authorship was strongly socially embedded and poems did not only serve as a means of communication between poet and possible addressees, but could fulfil numerous other functions too. Although seventeenth-century poets themselves would mainly proclaim they had no other intention in their art but the quest for honour and that it was nearly impossible to earn money by writing poetry, the conclusion must be that there was such a thing as hack writing avant la lettre. It was possible, after all, for poets to draw benefits from their literary work. Those benefits should primarily be interpreted not in financial terms, but socially.

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